

As Good As It Gets. By John McDermott

The year was 1786. The city was Charleston. And the name of America's newest game was golf. Today, more than 200 years later, the stunning beauty and endless variety of South Carolina's more than 350 public access courses have inspired golfers of every age and skill level to rediscover the beauty of the game.

Since its creation back in the Scottish Kingdom of Fife during the 15th century, the game of golf has come a long way. Part of that journey included a hop across the Atlantic to the port city of Charleston, SC, in the late 18th century. It was here that America took its first swing at the sport, using a hickory-shafted club to strike a small feather-stuffed ball.

Today, technology has changed the face of the game. Clubs are made from space-age alloys and balls are crafted to deliver varying degrees of distance and control. What hasn't changed, however, is the beauty of the game itself. The wonderful hours spent with friends and family, engaged in a delightful game of skill and challenge, and enjoying some of the most remarkable scenery the country has to offer.

Which brings us to South Carolina, the home of American golf and arguably America's most popular golf destination. It is here that golfers of every size, shape and skill level experience golf as it was meant to be, and create memories that last long

after the 18th hole has been played.

Rick Barry, head teaching professional at the famed Harbour Town Golf Links, watches stories unfold virtually every day.

"This past summer, I spent an hour working with a gentleman who was visiting from New England. As we were finishing up the lesson, he mentioned that he had a teenage daughter, and that she had wanted to play with him the next day. He was reluctant to bring her to our course, given his daughter's limited experience and our reputation as a true championship course. I encouraged him to reconsider. That next day, I ran into them after their round. To hear them laughing and talking – recalling good shots and a few that weren't so good – I knew they'd shared an experience they'd never forget."

And that's the real beauty of the game – the connections that golf fosters between family and friends. Connections that remind us that golf isn't always about keeping score. It's about sharing time with special people, in a very special place.

"We've got a group of guys that come down and stay with us every winter," says Ray Crabb, general manager of Litchfield Beach & Golf Resort. "I'd guess they've been coming to South Carolina and staying with us for 12, maybe 13 years now. They get up, and off they go to play 18 holes. They're back to the clubhouse for lunch and off for more golf in the afternoon. They play a different course every round – we have more than a hundred right here in the Myrtle Beach area – and they do that for five straight days. I asked them once if they travel to play anywhere else but South Carolina, and one of the fellows laughed and said 'Why would we? Golf here is as good as it gets.' And he's right."

But it isn't just the guys who come out to play. South Carolina has become the destination of choice for more and more couples traveling and playing together, as well as for a growing number of women who've carved out a little links time for themselves.

"It used to be that golf getaways were pretty much male-only," says Wade May of Cobb's Glen Country Club in Anderson, SC. "But that's all changed. We see lots of couples coming to play golf now. We have even had couples from Florida and Connecticut meeting here to have Thanksgiving dinner and a nice golfing holiday weekend." "It's such a perfect place to meet," says Michele of Florida. "The weather is perfect and the fall colors are beautiful this time of year."

"With the wonderful Southern hospitality, the fresh pecan pie, and such an enjoyable golf course, our decision to meet here for the last six years was

a no-brainer." Adds Janet of Connecticut, "It's great to be able to enjoy such a wonderful weekend and be able to connect with old friends at the same time."

Families, friends, couples, and even strangers meeting for the very first time on the first tee. As different as their lives may be from one another, all share a respect and passion for the game of golf. And nearly 500 years after the sport was created, and more than two centuries after it first came to America through Charleston, people continue to find that golf at its very best is played in a place as special and beautiful as the game itself. South Carolina.

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Cheraw State Recreation Area regularly receives four stars and top ratings for value in North America from *Golf Digest* readers. The park is 50 miles north of Florence, SC. 1-866-868-9630

Hickory Knob State Resort Park features golf along Strom Thurmond Lake and pine and hardwood forest filled with dogwoods and azaleas. The park is located in McCormick near the SC/GA border. 1-866-369-9331

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